

Meeting Minutes
CWAC Foster Care Recruitment Workgroup
July 20, 2021 10:00 am-11:30 am
Via WebEx / Conference line only

Participants (DCFS, POS): Dagenè Brown, Nancy Dorfman-Schwartz, Allison Archer, Amanda Lid, Carly Jones, Carolyn Thomas, Deb Lopez, Denise Rogers, Gayla Jackson, Jose Lopez, Kacy Anderson, Katie Friend, Kelly King, Krista Teckenbrock, Maria Nanos, Mariah Brandon, Mary Savage, Mary Kay Collins, Olivia DelGuidice, Pleshette Hamb, Ray Rezek, Terese Burton, Yesenia Perez

Meeting Objective: Provide updates related to FY21 objectives and ongoing initiatives.

Discussion:

Dagenè Brown motioned to approve the May 4th minutes as submitted. Allison Archer seconded. Motion passed with no objections or abstentions.

HMR Licensing initiative – Darryl not in attendance so Mary Kay and Dagenè provided an update. Recommendations have been made and sent to Darryl. Some have been implemented, like FP engagement. However, this is currently on pause due to the BH Panel’s request to review.

Family Finding Committee – Nancy provided an update. The recommendations have been approved by CWAC High End and will be going to CWAC Permanency on 7/23 for approval. They have also gone to the full CWAC for review. Highlights: utilize current and new/additional resources; need for a dedicated person per agency to work on process vs overburdening a caseworker. Anticipate discussion at the next full CWAC meeting in August. Will then be presented to CWAC FAS to consider for the next fiscal year. Re: training, advocating for all stakeholders and partnerships (*CASA, RTCs, Legal, etc.*) to have the same training and work collectively. Questions/comments/concerns from the group:

- Q. Is the Family Finding plan for the very beginning of a case? The expectation is to start before a youth ever comes into care but will also be focusing on youth who have been in the system for far too long. Kelly mentioned Wendy’s Wonderful Kids as potential partner for family finding work but need a better understanding of how it will be utilized. Advised to reach out to Tim Snowden, Timothy.Snowden2@Illinois.gov.

Recruitment efforts – Information requested from agencies re: numbers and plans. Noted that plans are due this year to APT monitor.

- Allendale – Many plans on the table but no success in getting inquiries. Efforts: posts on social media; posting/sending flyers at/to businesses; targeted recruitment for specialized foster care; began quarterly council meetings where any current and prospective FPs can join; created “fact facts” and “myth busters” brochures; going door-to-door with door hangers; posting FP testimonials on website. Hoping for in-person events to start back up soon. Number of licensed FPs in FY21: 2 non-relatives, 7 relatives. Challenges: more relative home disruptions than usual.
- Hephzibah – Efforts: virtual events and information sessions but very low attendance and interest in moving forward with process; therapeutic mentoring programs show promise with those who may not be ready to foster yet; flyers at libraries. Number of licensed FPs in FY21: 6 non-relatives, 1 relative. Challenges: numbers are lower than usual; more relative home disruptions/movement than usual.
- CYFS – Similar recruitment efforts to Allendale and Hephzibah, plus: added parent mentors in addition to recruiters as resource for new HMRs, which may have slowed down disruptions; community festivals where/when allowed; created brochures based on topic; started bus ad campaigns in Springfield last week, which has increased interest in fostering. Also focused heavily on retention efforts due to many FPs changing their status to inactive, refusing placements or closing their license because of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Includes: additional mentoring for FPs; presented baskets with family-oriented activities; supports for at-home schooling. Number of licensed FPs in FY21 not available yet due delay in reports from implementing new database. Ask to group: How do other agencies navigate reaching out to FPs that don’t currently want placements?
 - Allison – Debrief FPs after disruptions and check-in periodically.
 - OCH – Have surveys for FPs and youth asking what they prefer, what they can tolerate, what they won’t accept; updated periodically for FPs. Then work to “match up”. Have weekly disruption meetings with all staff of clients and FPs to discuss what can be done to stabilize, prevent an FP from closing license, etc.

- DCFS – Started media campaign in June 2020, which includes focus on certain populations (*e.g. older kids, LGBTQIA+, siblings, bilingual*) every other week. Shared data from 1/2021-3/2021: sibling postings received a disproportionate amount of attention; bilingual postings reached 2,291 people, received 256 inquires during week posted. Will follow-up on bilingual licensing numbers. Other efforts: completed virtual and in-person events, including one recently in a Latino community; will be at state fairs this summer; created postcards with QR codes that lead to information about FC programs and the inquiry page. Communications has also received invites from elected officials to participate in other in-person summer events, which will be shared with R& team. If any agency would like to collaborate with the R&R team on efforts/events, reach out to Dagenè and she will forward along: Dagene.Brown@illinois.gov.
- Little City – Efforts: implemented weekly disruption and placement preservation staffings; no in-person picnic due to restrictions so changed to picnic-in-a-bag; virtual FP appreciation; virtual sing-alongs for Christmas; virtual recruitment orientations, including personal/1:1 options; virtual “open house” for prospective FPs, which includes inviting current FPs for Q&A; collaboration with different committees/populations, e.g. LGBTQIA+ community; attempting to expand in Lake county; provide incentives for referrals and orientation attendance. Brief discussion re: virtual “open house”, including noticed success with two that turned in applications; offered AM and PM option in both Fall and Spring with Mariah/Emily, a case manager and active FP(s) in attendance; informal but participants gave positive feedback vs attending an orientation; provide gift cards to participants; encourage FPs to share tough cases in addition to the good ones. DCFS will share idea with R&R team. Number of licensed FPs in FY21 not available yet.
- OCH – See little success with open houses and fairs so focusing on online presence. Efforts: improved messaging re: youth the agency works with; implemented new system, Binti. Re: messaging, worked to adequately relay information that the agency mainly works with high-end, older, specialized youth. Created short videos that applicants are required to watch as part of application process. Working on short, YouTube videos for various topics: how to get licensed and what it takes; what type of kids OCH works with. Numbers: 105 applications received; 20 have become licensed; 20-30 in process to become licensed.
- Kids Above All – Efforts: trainings and monthly orientations went virtual, which has gotten positive feedback; in-person FP appreciation. Number of licensed FPs in FY21: 21 homes. Challenges: multiple disruptions every week; many FPs closed their licenses; homes reach capacity quickly due to aforementioned factors; FP fatigue due to constantly being asked to take placements when they’ve previously declined several others; a lot of caseworker turnover, which also affects FPs. Ask to group: What are other agencies doing to alleviate challenges?
 - Allendale – Encourage FPs to change their license to “inactive” instead of closing and keep in touch on their status. Offer clinical consults and additional support for homes with youth that have a lot of issues.
 - CYFS – Asking “What would it take…” to start conversation to stabilize placements and/or avoid closing licenses. Have seen positive results. Connecting licensing workers with caseworkers to advocate for and share information on the FP they’ll be working with.

Potential opportunity for fatigued FPs to provide respite instead of closing license or going “inactive”. Agencies should also be aware that capacity building will be a big topic for discussion due to Family First’s focus on family and community supports.

DCFS Co-chair updates – Dagenè will be transitioning to a new role soon and is working to identify a new co-chair. Will remain this subcommittee’s DCFS contact until that’s done. Thanked all for efforts thus far.

Public/Misc. comments – Should push for accepting electronic signatures on background checks since physical signatures take an additional two weeks to process. Dagenè will forward request to Darryl for a written response.

Meeting adjourned at 11:21 am.

Action items:

- Dagenè will follow-up with Darryl re: number of people licensed from the 256 bilingual inquires; electronic vs physical signatures on background checks.
- Agencies should get recruitment plans to APT monitor.

Next Meeting: October 19th, 2021 at 10:00 am via WebEx.

Future Meetings – Quarterly on the 3rd Tuesday of the month:

- Updated schedule TBD and distributed.